

FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date: August 31, 2012

Agenda Item: West Kootenai WMA Forest Management Proposal

Action Needed: Final Action

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Background: FWP has proposed to thin approximately 240 acres of dense conifer forest on the West Kootenai WMA in an effort to reduce wildfire risks, improve wildlife habitat, and improve forest health. A 2009 petition signed by 57 area residents urged FWP to conduct thinning on the WMA to protect against wildfire. Thinning efforts will be focused along approximately 12,000 feet of interior roads and areas adjacent to private lands, with several interior thinning units as well. Approximately 300 yards of road must be constructed in order to complete the project. A DNRC grant for \$41,000 for fuels reduction has been received to help complete this project, which is expected to cost FWP an additional \$45,000 after the sale of merchantable timber.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A Draft EA was released for a 3-week period from July 31 through August 21, 2012. A public meeting was held on August 9th in the West Kootenai Community which was attended by 27 people. Notices have been posted in area newspapers and on August 8th the Tobacco Valley News printed a front-page article describing the project. The vast majority of comments received thus far have been favorable, with some concerns expressed for public safety, especially in regard to logging truck traffic. A Decision Notice will be provided to the Commission on or before the time of final Commission action.

Alternatives and Analysis:

No Action – Defer entire project until some point in the future: If the proposed action is not implemented, fire risks will continue to increase that could potentially impact far more acreage than just the WMA. Such an uncontrolled wildfire would impact cover for wintering ungulates for decades. Forest health would continue to decline and opportunities to improve stand conditions for wintering wildlife would be lost, along with the \$41,000 grant from DNRC.

Proposed Action – Complete the project as proposed: Implementation of the proposed action will significantly reduce fire risks and improve safety for firefighters, should the need ever arise. Timber stand treatments will also result in improved winter range conditions. Current forest conditions are providing important winter cover, but habitat quality is declining over time due to crowded stand conditions. This proposed treatment will change habitat trajectory to an improving condition, creating fuller forest canopies that are better able to intercept snow for wintering ungulates. The project will also increase lichen production, an important winter forage for deer. Costs to treat the stands will be less for FWP than in the future because of the availability of the DNRC grant.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Barring any substantial issues that might be raised by the public, FWP supports moving forward with this project as proposed. It is our contention that both the public and wildlife will be better served by the completion of this project.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Commission approve the West Kootenai WMA forest management project as proposed.